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THE "KING'S REACH" SITE (18 Cv 83):  
EXCAVATION OF A LATE 17TH-CENTURY TOBACCO PLANTATION

by

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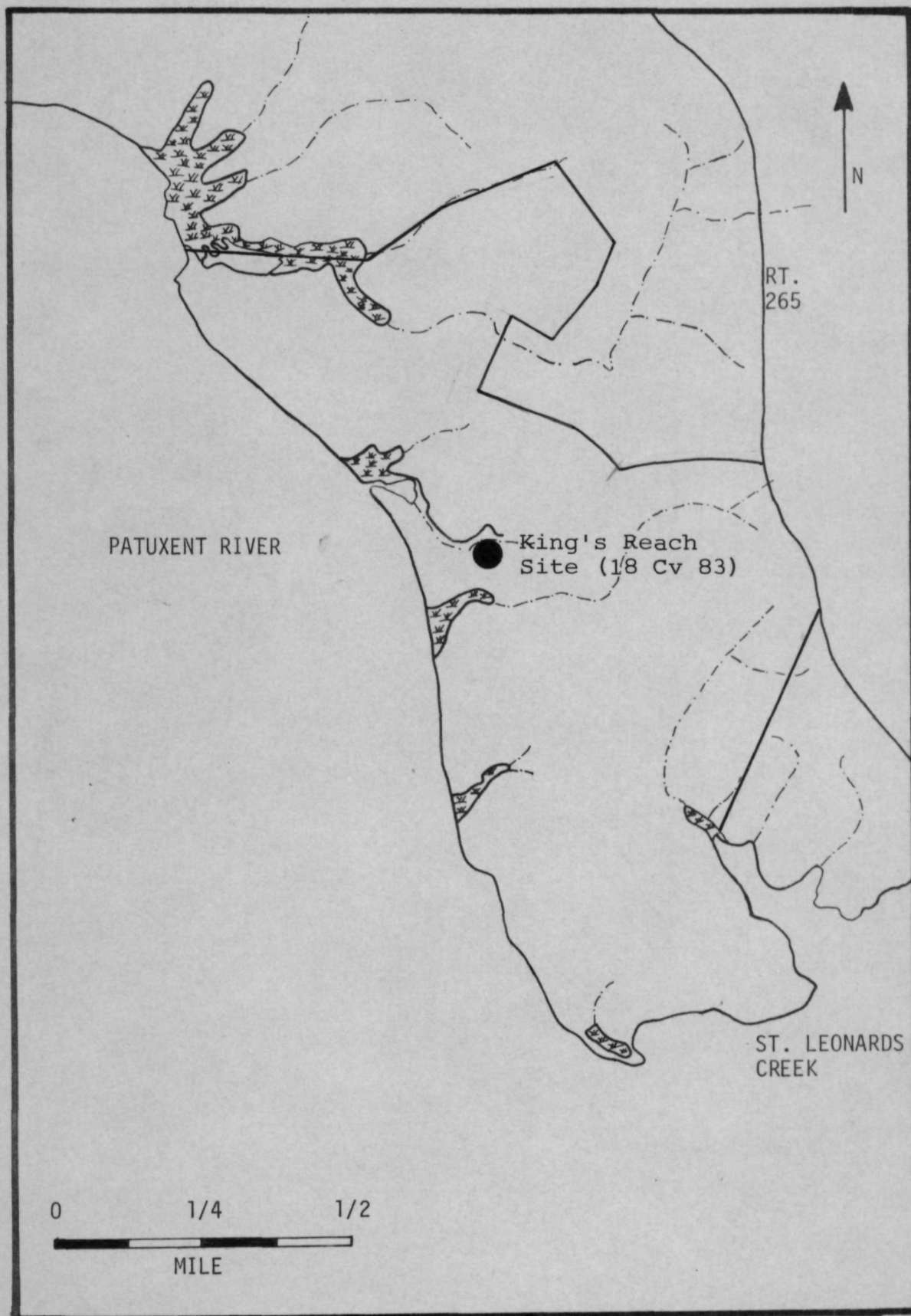
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During the summer of 1984 the Maryland Historical Trust/Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum conducted an intensive excavation at the "King's Reach" site, located at the Park in lower Calvert County, Maryland. The 512-acre preserve was donated to the State of Maryland in 1983 by Mary Marvin Breckinridge Patterson as a memorial to her late husband. The Park mandate is broad indeed, serving as an environmental and archaeological preserve, as well as a research and interpretive/educational facility.

In 1981 a tenant on the farm brought a large collection of archaeological materials recovered from the property to the attention of the Trust's Southern Maryland Regional Archaeologist. A resulting preliminary survey conducted under the direction of Michael A. Smolek and Wayne E. Clark succeeded in discovering almost 50 sites, spanning virtually the entire period from ca. 7000 BC to the present. That number included at least nine Euro-American sites dating to the 17th century -- making it the most numerous concentration of early sites in Maryland outside of St. Mary's City discovered so far. When combined with documentary research, this evidence points to the port town of St. Leonard, in existence from ca. 1683 to 1706, being located there.

The King's Reach site was one of those discovered in the 1981 survey. It is defined by the distribution of total historic artifacts collected from the plowed field surface. Another possibly associated site is located nearby. Analysis of those artifacts pointed to a second-half of the 17th century occupation. One ceramic type was tentatively identified as English Surrey-Hampshire lead-glazed earthenware -- a type that heretofore has appeared on Chesapeake sites in the period ca. 1640-1665. The proximity of these two sites and of a probable Late Woodland village site, located nearer the Patuxent, served as a major impetus for selecting this field as the focus of initial archaeological



Location of site (18 Cv 83), Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, Calvert County, MD.

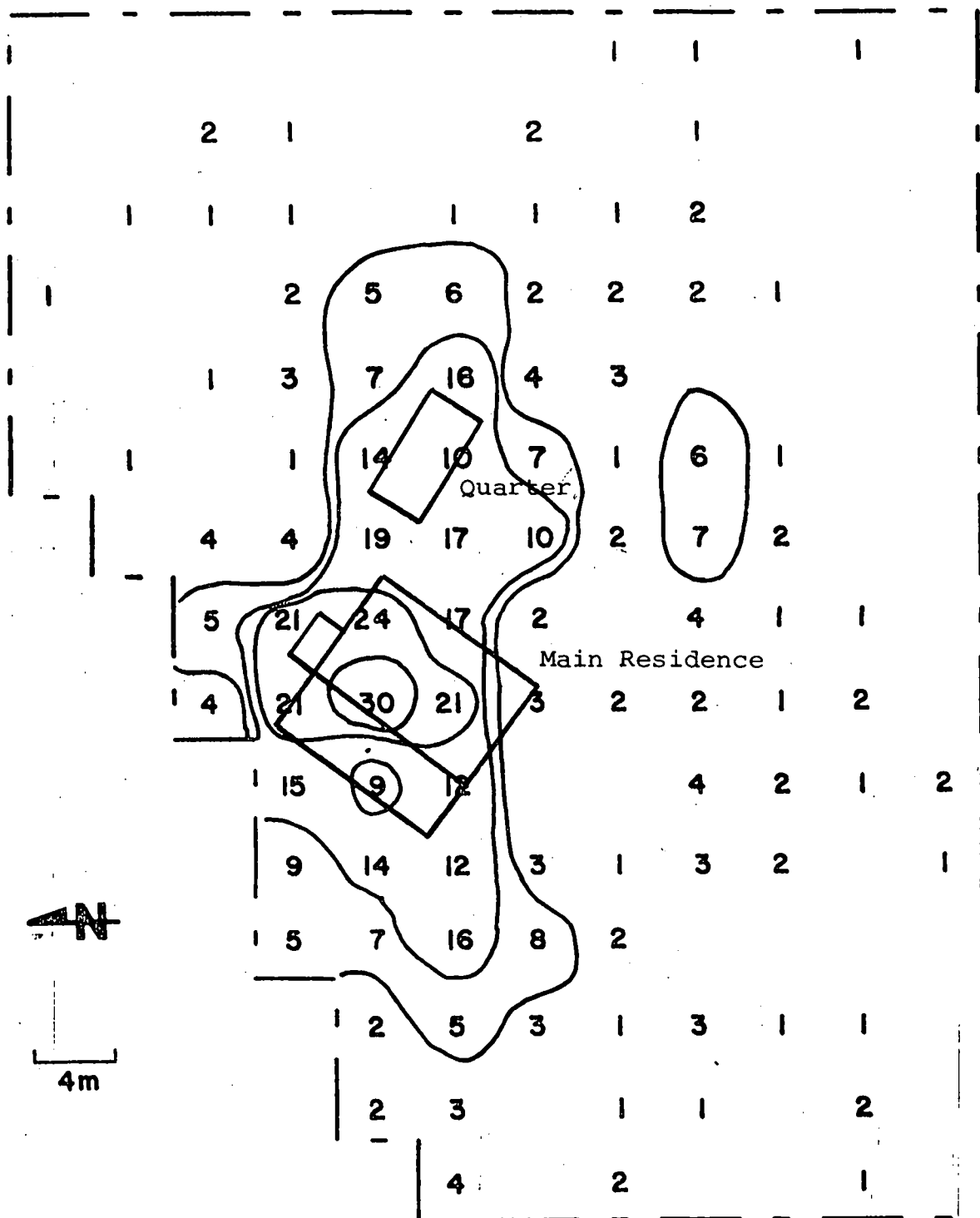
investigations at the Park -- eventually leading to its interpretation through on-site exhibits. The King's Reach excavation, therefore, is the beginning of extensive work planned to be undertaken there over the next several years.

Last spring, more intensively re-collecting the section of the field initially indicated as the site allowed closer pinpointing of its extent. The distribution of total non-structural historic materials clearly delineates the site core -- concentrating in the area where subsequently a major structure was revealed, and extending over a second, smaller structure. Based on the surface data, plow zone excavation in 2x2-meter units was begun in June, with virtually immediate results: an octagonal pistol barrel, quantities of brass furniture hardware, harness equipage, beads, fine table glass, pewter and latteen spoons, a wide range of ceramics and glass, and, remarkably, two brass pestle fragments. Except for the possible Surrey wares, which occur in quantity and thus cannot be attributed to the heirloom factor, the recovered materials overwhelmingly point to a ca. 1680s to 1710 period of occupation: the presence of early Staffordshire earthenwares and stonewares and absence of such indicators as white salt-glazed stonewares, Buckley earthenwares, and materials commonly found on earlier sites in the region has served to suggest this approximately 30-year period of occupation. Tobacco pipe bowl shapes and calculation of bore diameters, wine bottle shapes, etc. support this finding. An extensive complex of subsurface features was revealed, corresponding with the major surface artifact concentration.

At the completion of this summer's field work, what appears to be the site core was completely exposed, revealing a relatively large dwelling and smaller structure, possibly a servants quarter, with a connecting fore yard defined by several fence lines. The structures are of a type, both in construction detail and overall plan, that has been encountered at dozens of 17th-century sites in

# KING'S REACH SITE

## SURFACE COLLECTION, TOTAL HISTORIC

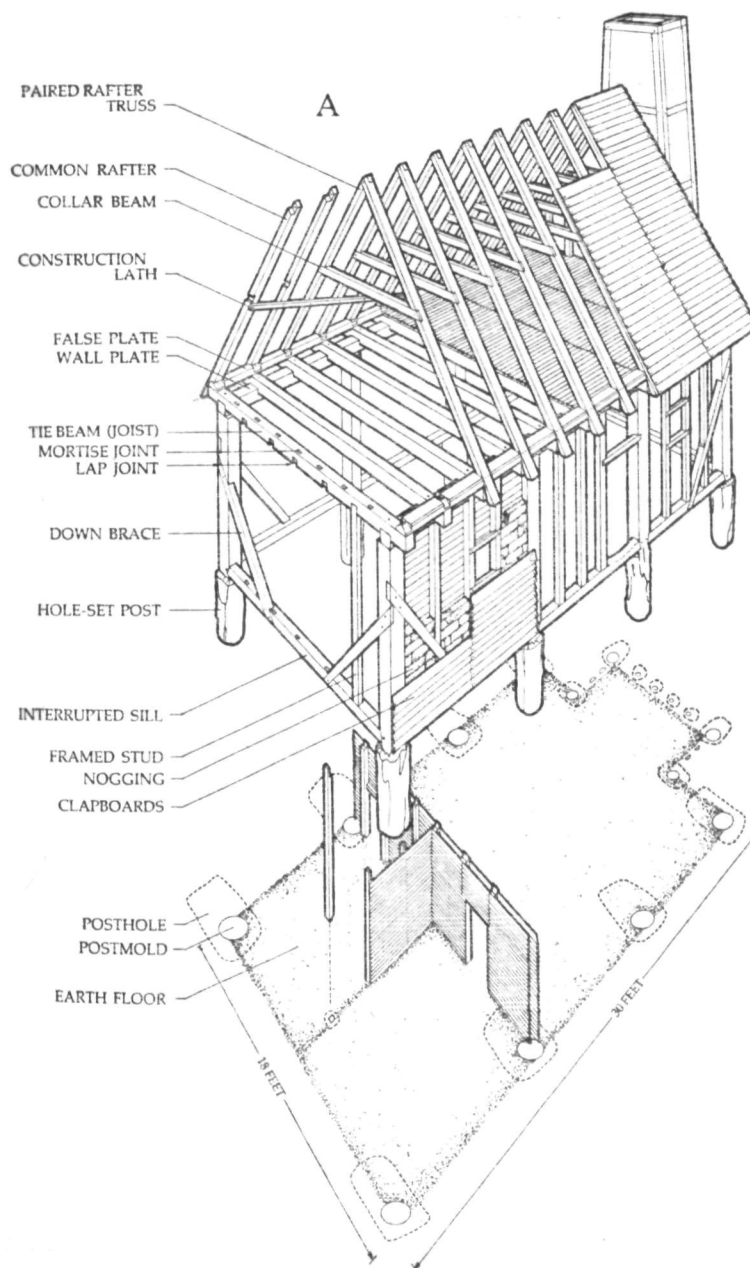


(Five, ten, twenty, and thirty-artifact isobars)

Virginia and Maryland over the last 30 years. The major structural support consisted of eight hole-set, vertical posts around which a wooden superstructure was raised. This reconstruction of what is known as an "ordinary beginner's house" of the mid-17th century, based on the results of extensive archaeological and documentary research and printed in Carson et al. (1981), is representative of the building type and is similar to the King's Reach house in several respects: having a main core supported by eight structural posts, arranged in two four-post sidewall units -- ten feet apart and 20 feet across -- forming a roughly 30x20-foot unit, one story in height with a sleeping loft above and single gable-end hearth. In addition to the 30x20-foot main core, however, this dwelling includes a 10-foot wide shed addition running along the length of the rear and a small (6x7-foot) pantry attached to the north gable and conveniently located for access from the kitchen.

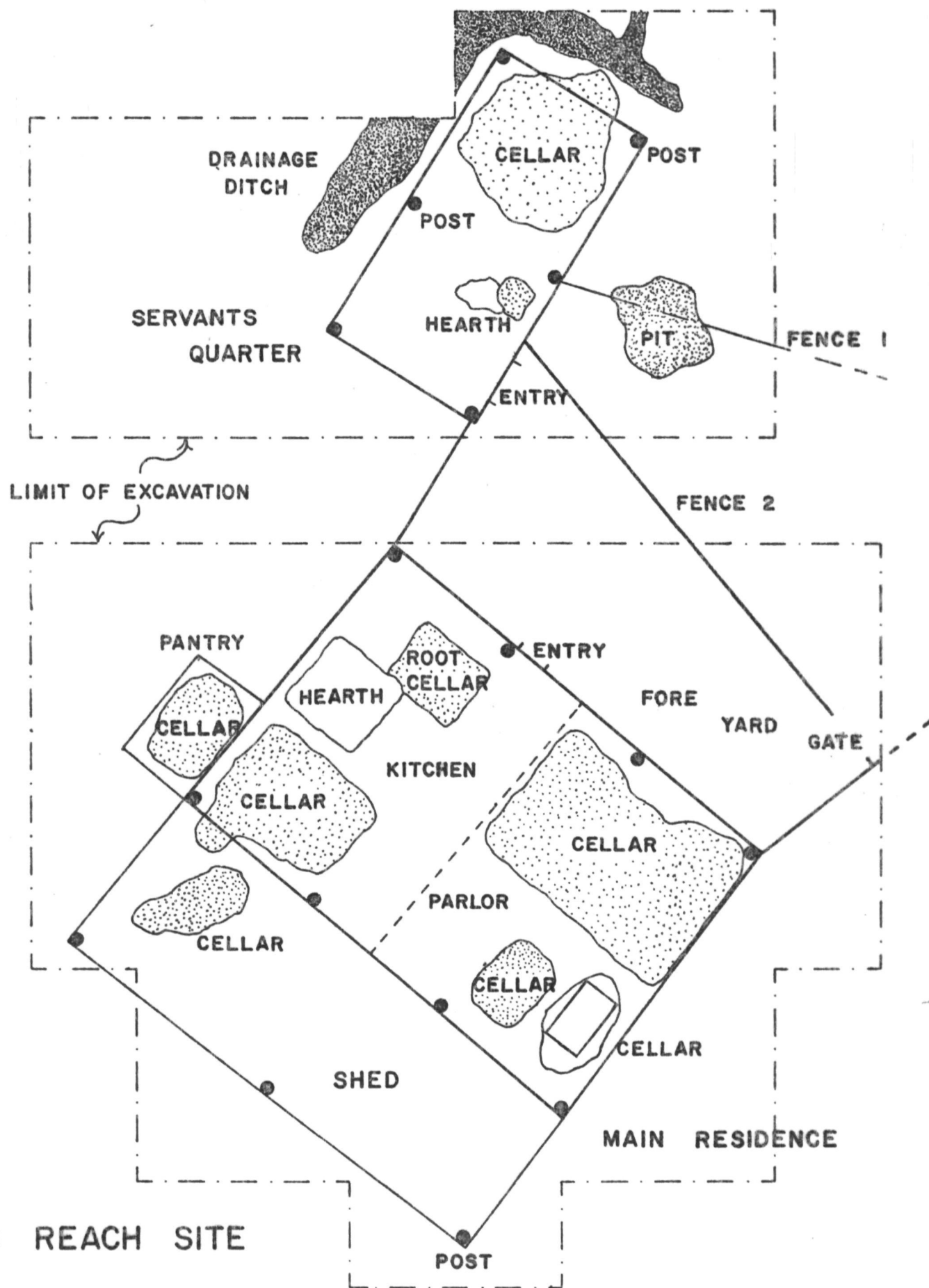
Easily the most distinctive feature of the house plan, however, is the presence of what appears to be at least six filled cellars of varying size. How these cellars interrelate temporally as well as functionally remains a major puzzle that will not be understood until their complete excavation is accomplished. The largest of the six, approximately 8x14-feet in dimension, underlies the unheated chamber. A corner section of that cellar was excavated in 1984, revealing a flat-bottomed, vertical-sided pit, slightly over four feet in depth. There are a series of ledges dug into the subsoil -- possibly slots to support steps for a bulkhead entrance. Virtually no destruction debris was found in the 23 separate layers of cellar fill, making the cause for its filling a continuing mystery.

Another of the cellars, one of two smaller ones located in the southwest corner of the structure, was completely excavated -- revealing a quantity of interesting, virtually intact artifacts: an iron padlock, a tobacco pipe, with an "IE" maker's mark -- possibly that of Isaac Evans, a Bristol pipe maker



"An Ordinary Beginner's House," from Carson, Cary, Norman F. Barka, William M. Kelso, Garry W. Stone, and Dell Upton. Impermanent architecture in the Southern American colonies. Winterthur Portfolio 16 (2/3):135-196 (1981).

King's Reach interpretive site plan.





operating from ca. 1698 to 1712, a pewter spoon, as well as an English copper ha-penny dated 1695, together with brick, mortar, and plaster debris. The cellar was about 2.5 feet in depth, with a debris-filled layer and four earlier, wash-fill layers. Together this evidence suggests that the cellar was topped off with debris from the destruction of the house -- indicating that those materials mark a terminal date for the end of the occupation of the house. As a whole, these artifacts support an ending date of occupation no later than circa 1710. That the feature's initial function was that of a cellar is borne out by its appearance after excavation: with several post molds, molds of intervening timber cribbing, and another imprint, possibly of a set wooden box. The posts and box do not appear associated, suggesting two phases of support structure for the cellar walls. That the cellar was discontinued in that use before demolition is supported by the lack of wood remains -- the posts and timbers appear to have been deliberately pulled. Finally, the pit's irregular shape suggests it may have been adapted for use as a cellar, possibly beginning its life as a borrow pit for brick and daub-making.

In addition to the main house and its puzzling collection of cellars, another, smaller structure was revealed, a similar post-in-the-ground building supported by six main posts forming a 20x10-foot rectangle with an apparent cellar (eight feet square) at one end. An area of scorched subsoil located toward one end points to a hearth location there. The domestic function evidenced by the hearth, together with its proximity to the main residence, suggests use as a quarter.

Two features associated with the quarter provide interesting supplemental data: first, a ditch running the length of one side of the structure, extending from one corner post to the other, suggests that the sill along that side was replaced; second, another ditch, larger and curving around the corner, runs parallel to the first. When excavated, this ditch was found to become shallower going downgrade, and to be round-bottomed and apparently non-struct-

turally oriented. As the site is located on the down-slope of a slight rise, I suggest that the second ditch was dug for drainage, routing run-off around the quarter and toward a nearby ravine. Replacement of a rotted sill could have been an obvious consequence of this drainage problem. Significantly, this replaced sill is the only evidence for rebuilding or repair of either structure; there is ample evidence that this type of earth-fast structure probably could not survive longer than 30 years at most without such repairs -- coinciding with the hypothesized length of occupation.

The site plan shows the relationship of the main house and the servant's quarter, with two fence lines connecting the two and forming a front yard or fore court. Entries to both structures appear to have opened onto this fenced area, providing ease of access between them. Present plans call for continuing and hopefully completing excavation at King's Reach next summer, at which time we will focus on excavating those features already exposed as well as opening additional areas searching to complete this interpretive picture of the plantation.

Because of the extremely poor state of preservation of Calvert County's early records, due to losses inflicted by three successive courthouse fires, we have no idea of the identity of the occupants -- and probably never will. The artifact assemblage, however, points to a household of at least middling means, which is supported by the architectural data -- with a 900-square-foot dwelling, glazed windows, and a servants quarter placing the owners relatively high on the region's economic scale.

As for the site function, based on both the site plan and environmental setting, presently it appears to be a tobacco plantation, like the overwhelming majority of households of the period. An important consideration in this issue of function remains the existence of the unusual quantity of cellars located beneath the main residence. As this is one of the first dwellings from the last quarter of the 17th century to be excavated in the Chesapeake, it may be

that this phenomenon represents a larger, heretofore unrecognized pattern of cultural evolution -- or simply a possibly unique situation resulting from a specific function. It certainly is possible that the site served a secondary capacity -- such as a merchant's store or tavern, for instance, two of the more plausible possibilities -- which could necessitate increased storage capacity inside the structure itself -- thus, a functional cause for the archaeological manifestation. At present, I simply cannot say -- hopefully, when the site is completely excavated, and the results of the distributions of artifacts recovered from the plow zone excavations are added, we will be able to address those issues.

Finally, King's Reach appears to have been occupied during the same period that the community of St. Leonard is believed to have existed in the area. The layout, functions, and spatial dynamics of that community presently can only be guessed at; King's Reach appears to be an outlying plantation, but its association with the town presently is not really known. That issue will have to await completion of investigations of the other eight known 17th-century sites in the area as well as that of King's Reach.

